DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 689 EA 018 436

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TITLE Instructional Problem Solving in Staff Development: The Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader.
PUB DATE 15 Feb 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (70th, Orlando, FL, February 14-18, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; *Faculty Development; High Schools; Inservice Teacher Education; *Instructional Improvement; *Instructional Leadership; Interprofessional Relationship; Principals; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS Pittsburgh School District PA

ABSTRACT

In 1980 the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Public Schools recognized needs for significant improvement in staff evaluation, student achievement, individual school effectiveness, and the clarification of systemwide objectives and expectations. The instructional leadership committee appointed to establish a unified approach to effective instruction reviewed the literature and created a staff development team committed to developing principals as instructional leaders. The training that the principals received increased their confidence and enhanced school effectiveness, leading to higher student achievement. The case of John A. Brashear High School is illustrative of the principal's role. The principal formed an "instructional cabinet" to assess the school's needs and develop action plans. This team decided to focus on reducing the ninth-grade failure rate by implementing a plan involving tutorial assistance, student achievement recognition, inservice training for teachers using the Madeline Hunter teaching model, and peer development assistance among teachers. The program cut the ninth-grade failure rate by over 50 percent in 2 years. Such examples indicate that the principal's role in encouraging local school program development to meet district objectives is central, and involves setting clear expectations, utilizing lead teachers effectively, establishing structures for professional interaction, and differentiating among supervisory functions. (PGD)

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INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT: THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

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Paper presented at the 70th Conference of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Orlando, Florida, February 15, 1986.

EA 018 436

Instructional Problem Solving In Staff Development: The Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

If a school is to develop to its fullest potential, then the principal must be able to nurture that growth. That means that not only should the principal possess effective building management skills, but also competence as an instructional leader. The Pittsburgh Board of Education recognized this formula for district growth and acted consciously and deliberately to cultivate instructional leadership.

During the fall of 1980, Pittsburgh Public schools commissioned the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh to diagnose district needs. A needs assessment developed by Dr. William Cooley was administered. This assessment involved all administrators in the district, as well as input from every school-based role group. Among the priorities identified by the Board from this research were (1) staff evaluation (2) student achievement in the basic skills and (3) increased effectiveness of individual schools. Specifically, the overwhelming majority of principals in the district identified the following as serious problems:

(1) lack of system-wide expectations regarding instructional responsibilities of teachers

(2) lack of good criteria by which to evaluate teacher instructional techniques and strategies

(3) lack of clarity of system-wide objectives or yearly goals

(4) lack of a definitive system for evaluating the performance of teachers and other professional staff.

In addition, the school district consistently scored below national norms in almost every area of measured student achievement. In essence, the problem was an urban school system in instructional decline.

In March, 1981, Dr. Richard C. Wallace, Jr., Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools took action. He convened the Instructional Leadership Committee. The task of this committee was to address the staff evaluation need by establishing a unified approach to effective instruction. This unified approach was to provide a system-wide standard of excellence in instruction. Concurrently, this twenty member committee believed that improving the quality of instruction would impact the "quality of learning." Among the committee members were principals, supervisors, central staff and teachers. They thoroughly reviewed the literature for guidance.

Everything from effective schools research through learning style theory was reviewed. Ron Edmonds' work on effective schools became a very important piece in the problem-solving approach of the committee. Effective schools research clearly linked the role of principal as an instructional leader with effective schools. Another concern of the committee was effective teaching. Much of the research seemed to be

crystallized in practical terms by Madeline Hunter. In essence, the committee found the perfect combination. The principal would be the initial focus of training on effective teaching and effective schools would be the message.

Consequently, a Staff Development Team (SDT) was created to focus on the principal's development as an instructional leader. This effort became known as the Pittsburgh Research-based Instructional Supervisory Model (PRISM). Training involved learning and practicing the elements of effective instruction, analyzing instruction, conferring skills and instructional program development/problem-solving. Among the training activities were peer teaching lessons, teaching students during summer school, conducting peer conferences, conducting school based needs assessments, developing goal statements and yearly plans of action. This SDT effort has been extremely successful.

Success is measured in many ways. Principals have indicated in research projects conducted by Salmon-Cox (1983) that they now feel confident in their competence as instructional leaders. They no longer identify their four initial concerns as problems. There is a new teacher evaluation system in place. Student achievement in the Pittsburgh Public Schools has soared from below national norms to significantly above the national norms. Even though these results of a unified effort for instructional improvement are dramatic, there is one result that highlights the importance of the principal as an instructional leader. That is the improvement of principals skills in instructional problem solving.

One such example is the following scenario of a principal in a large inner city school. This school seems to reflect many of the concerns of today's community of educators. It also represents one effective approach for addressing these concerns in a realistic and practical manner.

In 1983, Mr. Robert E. Nicklos was appointed principal of Brashear High School. His first task was to review the current school program. The next step was to align the program with district goals. The foundation of this process was based on the following summary.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1981

S U M M A R Y

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS WAS IMPLEMENTED TO IDENTIFY CONDITIONS THAT CAN AND SHOULD BE IMPROVED. THE EFFORT INVOLVED HUNDREDS OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE DISTRICT AND IN THE COMMUNITY. FOUR AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT EMERGED.

THESE NEEDS ARE:

1. TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN BASIC SKILLS (MAP).
2. TO REVISE CURRENT PROCEDURES FOR PERSONNEL EVALUATION (PRISM).
3. TO DEVELOP WAYS TO ATTRACT AND HOLD STUDENTS.
4. TO MANAGE THE IMPACT OF ENROLLMENT DECLINE.

Brashear High School reflects many of the characteristics of schools in the urban setting. John A. Brashear High School is an inner-city school, serving approximately 2100 students. Most of the students receive free or reduced lunches, indicating the community economic status. There is a varied ethnic student population with a racial mix of approximately 60% white and 40% black/other minorities. The staff of 170 persons is genuinely interested in the school and student progress.

The principal channeled this energy to promote staff involvement in this problem-solving approach to school improvement. An instructional cabinet of school-based personnel was formulated to closely examine particular problems manifested in the school. This team consisted of teachers, instructional chairpersons, supervisory support staff, pupil support staff, deans and the principal, as chairperson. In essence, the purpose of this cabinet was to look at the school, diagnose school problems, develop action plans, and follow-through on these efforts. The formal diagnosis included analysis of data from MAP (Monitoring Achievement in Pittsburgh) scores, California Achievement Test scores, and subject centered achievement tests. There was informal diagnosis based upon teacher, student, parental, support staff and administrative feedback gathered through numerous meetings and discussions. Inferential diagnosis, based on information gathered from classroom observations and conferences completed the process of providing

sufficient data to identify major school needs/goals. The usage of the data, gathered through the processes mentioned above, formed the basis of an instructional problem solving approach to the issues facing the school in general and specific groups of students in particular.

As a result of this needs assessment, it was decided that the school would focus on some specific concerns related to the 9th grade class. Each year this class has between 600-700 entering students. In 1983 there was failure rate of 34% of these students. This percentage closely paralleled the 30% dropout rate in the school. The average daily attendance rate for 9th grade students was approximately 81%. The need in this area was pronounced. The goal became the 9th grade failure rate reduction.

Under the direction of the principal, a multifaceted plan was developed. English teachers developed a five week tutorial program for 9th grade students that addressed the MAP objectives and key elements of the English curriculum. Students who needed the program were identified by staff, parents and through self-identification. Westinghouse Electric Corporation, the business partner of John A. Brashear High School, provided retired personnel who were trained by 9th grade English teachers to assist in tutoring students. The company also provided incentives for students who attended all tutorial sessions. At the completion of the five week session in English, a new five week tutorial session was initiated by the Mathematics department.

The Math department utilized the identical format. They developed a program based upon the MAP program in math and other salient elements of the 9th grade math curriculum.

Other motivational strategies were developed for this program. The staff held achievement award assemblies to recognize all students who made the honor roll. In addition to rewarding the honor students, a category of Superstar Awards was established to provide incentives for all 9th graders who improved in at least two subjects and did not regress in any other subjects. The Superstar Awards broadened the base of student and staff recognition for student achievement.

Teachers and other staff members attacked the attendance problem by closely monitoring homeroom and class attendance. Letters of praise, as well as concern were mailed to homes in an attempt to raise the average daily attendance rate of students.

In addition to analyzing data about students and the school environment, the cabinet felt that a program was needed to make teachers more aware of the impact of teaching strategies and techniques on student achievement. Five half-day inservice programs were developed to give all staff a common instructional base for effective teaching. This staff development effort was based on the Madeline Hunter teaching model. Particular areas of interest were:

1. Lesson design techniques with the focus upon teaching behaviors and student outcomes.
2. Classroom management techniques.
3. Monitoring the students and adjusting the teaching.

4. Motivational strategies.
5. Reinforcement strategies.
6. Promoting active student participation in class.

Peer group interaction was promoted among the teaching staff. In order to identify the instructional strategies that were being utilized in the various classrooms, teachers observed each other teaching. Using the instructional skills that were taught at the Schenley High School Teacher Center and the half-day school inservice, teachers were able to give feedback and share ideas. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers' research emphasized that the process of "Peer Coaching" involves five major functions:

1. The provision of companionship.
2. Giving technical feedback.
3. Analysis of application, extending executive control.
4. Adaptation to students.
5. Personal facilitation.

These functions are in the process of evolving at John A. Brashear High School.

A dramatic result of this interactive process of staff development was the reduction of the 9th grade failure rate from 34% in 1983 to a level of 14% in 1984 and a maintenance level of 13.5% in 1985. It is felt that district priorities balanced by school staff priorities can result in a situation specific staff development program that can impact on local building concerns. School-based and district staffs must adopt the philosophy that staff development is an evolutionary process, based upon the

development of professional interaction and collegiality. This philosophy is paramount in accomplishing a positive educational environment where maximum student achievement and behavioral outcomes can be realized. Felding and Schalock have stated that some functions that principals have to foster for successful programs are:

1. Set clear expectations for both teacher involvement and their own involvement.
2. Utilize effectively the talents of lead teachers.
3. Establish collaborative structures to foster teachers' professional interaction.
4. Differentiate between supervision intended to (a) fulfill administrative requirements, (b) promote individual growth, and (c) support program implementation or improvement.

This integrative problem-solving approach to school improvement is most effective when the principal and staff are equally committed and involved. Commitment should be founded on collaboratively established priorities, goals and actions. The growth of educational professionalism is dependent upon the opportunity to experience it.

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